



Containers are stacked Jan. 28 at the Port of Tacoma.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

# Chinese Zika rules threaten farm exports

Containers must be quarantined, treated for mosquitoes

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Chinese regulations aimed at stopping the Zika virus from entering its borders threaten to impede U.S. agricultural exports.

The U.S. was recently added to a list of countries covered by Chinese rules that require shipping containers to be quarantined and treated for mosquitoes, which transmit the birth defect-causing virus.

"It is going to be burdensome. It's going to add a lot of cost and burden to U.S. exports," said Abigail Struxness, program manager of the Agriculture Transportation Coalition.

Last year, total U.S. agricultural exports to China topped \$20 billion.

At this point, it appears that Chinese customs officials are offering to fumigate incoming containers for a fee, or accept certificates stating that containers were fumigated prior to shipping, Struxness said.

It's unclear whether the regulations will apply to refrigerated cargo, which often travels at temperatures low enough to kill the insects, she said.

Agricultural exporters are also unsure which fumigation methods are required by the Chinese, or which U.S. agency is responsible for the certification, she said.

The Agriculture Transportation Coalition is still trying to assess the added costs and delays resulting from the rules, as well as



Dockworkers unload containers from the OOCL Rotterdam, a Hong Kong-registered vessel.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press File

how they will impact U.S. competitiveness, Struxness said.

Agricultural shippers are concerned about how fumigation will affect food-grade commodities and organic crops, she said.

"That's another thing we need to figure out."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the only state to experience locally transmitted cases of Zika through mosquitoes is Florida. Locally transmitted cases of Zika have also occurred in the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has issued a notice stating agency officials are discussing the regulations and acceptable documentation with their counterparts in China.

The notice states that Zika is a human health issue, not a phytosanitary problem, which means APHIS officials cannot validate mosquito treatments on phytosanitary certificates.

USDA's position is troubling for John Szczepanski, director of the U.S. Forage Export Council, because it will likely delay a comprehensive U.S. response to the Chinese Zika regulations.

"The people who could help us are saying mosquitoes aren't under their jurisdiction," he said.

The notice put out by APHIS would indicate that USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service is the appropriate agency to deal with the problem — except that it doesn't employ any entomologists, Szczepanski said. "It adds to the frustration of agricultural exporters."

China is an export market for alfalfa grown in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and California, he said.

The risk is that without uniformity, agricultural exporters will come up with their own individual treatment methods and certifications, adding to the confusion, he said. "Exporters want to do the right thing, but they don't know exactly what to do."

# Washington Farm Bureau rips Puget Sound plan

Federal report understates farmland loss

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Washington Farm Bureau has broadly criticized a state and federal plan to breach dikes and inundate hundreds of acres of farmland in Whatcom and Skagit counties to create fish habitat.

The Farm Bureau says a report by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers understates the loss of farmland in Skagit County and undervalues agriculture in both counties.

"Our opposition rests on the principle that preserving farmable ground should be the single greatest priority of our state and our nation," the organization's director of government relations, Tom Davis, said in written comments submitted Aug. 12.

The Corps and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife have been working for more than a decade on a plan to roll back "ecological degradation" in Puget Sound.

The Corps and WDFW propose to convert into fish habitat 1,807 acres in Whatcom County, 256 acres in Skagit County and 38 acres in Jefferson County.

Collectively known as the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Projects, the three would cost an estimated \$452 million. Funding has not been approved by



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Water flows over farmland Aug. 1 in Skagit County, the day the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife breached a Skagit River dike to create fish habitat. WDFW and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers propose converting more farmland in the county into fish habitat. The Washington Farm Bureau opposes the plan.

Congress or the Legislature.

The projects in Whatcom and Skagit counties rely heavily on inundating farmland to return land to pre-settlement conditions. The Corps' report calls the loss of farmland minimal and necessary.

The Farm Bureau notes that residential and industrial areas are never targeted for restoration — only farmland, the supply of which is finite.

"Maintaining the ability to grow the food that sustains our nation should not be taken lightly, and yet time after time the primary focus for salmon recovery projects is prime farmland," Davis wrote.

In its report, the Corps stated the loss of 800 acres of "prime farmland" in the Nooksack River Delta in Whatcom County would be economically "minor and insignificant."

The Corps reported that the project along the North Fork of the Skagit River in-

cluded only 5 acres used for agriculture.

A Corps spokeswoman said the report should have qualified that the land included only 5 acres of "prime farmland," while other land would be prime farmland if drained or irrigated.

Washington State Department of Agriculture land surveys show that almost the entire area is being used to grow vegetables, berries, hay or other crops.

"It's all farms," said Allen Rozema, executive director of Skagitians to Preserve Farmland. "We know it's more than 5 acres."

The Corps reported that the acres lost in Whatcom and Skagit counties would be only a fraction of the region's agricultural land.

Davis said the Corps' analysis was too simplistic and failed to consider how the farmland fits into the area's agricultural economy.

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